

Career Path

When advice must always be golden

by Anna Tong



David Bellingham,
CEO, ING Financial
Planning Limited
Photo: CY Leung

Expect excellence of yourself and everyone around you

Most people have goals to achieve and those who have done so usually have something in common: aspirations, commitments and dedication.

Based on a genuine interest in the financial planning industry, and driven by a true passion, David Bellingham, CEO of ING Financial Planning Limited entered the financial services field 10 years ago. He chose to develop a career in financial planning as it gave him the opportunity to balance his experience and financial skills, and make a difference in people's lives by helping them achieve their most important goals in life. "Playing an important part in helping clients to reach their life-time goals gives me considerable job satisfaction," says Mr Bellingham.

Prior to joining ING, Mr Bellingham was managing director of his own financial planning business. The success of his business made his company one of the top advisers for ING in Australia. Later on, he sold the business and became national manager, practice development and deputy general manager of RetireInvest, the largest aligned financial advisory distribution force for ING Australia. Being successful in that role, he was offered his current position in Hong Kong. He attributes his success to his professionalism, a passion in utilising his qualifications to help people, and particularly old-fashioned hard work. "I work to one motto — expect excellence of yourself and everyone around you — that's the secret," says Mr Bellingham.

He believes the most positive aspect of his position is that it enables him to set the direction of the business and so make better provision for the clients. "I get the chance to set the course of success of the business operation which in turn helps our customers," says Mr Bellingham. "The financial planning market is still young, and it gives ING the opportunity to play a part in shaping the industry." He emphasises that the high standard of professionalism among ING's financial advisers has maintained ING's reputation as one of the leaders in the financial planning industry. "We don't sell products, we offer advice," he stresses.

Lifetime career

Mr Bellingham rates dedication and determination as major requirements for anybody wishing to enter the profession. They should not regard it as a cosy white-collar job but have a strong desire to succeed in financial planning both in terms of qualifications and personal characteristics. "They should regard it as a lifetime career," he says.

Candidates come from different stages of life and with varied qualifications since there are numerous entry points into the profession. "We get people from all walks of life

ranging from fresh graduates, and professionals like accountants to experienced life agents from other companies," says Mr Bellingham. New recruits are fully supported by a mentor who will help them to develop and become independent advisers.

An ING financial planner's responsibilities are split between doing research and analysis on the client's behalf and spending time with new and current clients. Part of the daily routine includes continued training development so advisers stay up-to-date with the latest trends and products as well as gaining the qualifications to further enhance their career. "Senior advisers of course spend some of their time mentoring new ones, helping them to do a better job and get their careers off the ground," says Mr Bellingham.

One of the main challenges facing the industry is the changing professional standards and structure. "We are constantly evolving and making up the boundaries as we go along," says Mr Bellingham. However, he points out that the bottom line is manifested in an adviser's advice and actions. Knowing the degree of responsibility these people bear, he looks forward to when the industry becomes more mature so that the expertise of advisers will be fully recognised, and so they will enjoy a position of respect similar to the present image of doctors, solicitors and accountants.

As the industry continues to develop, Mr Bellingham sees financial planning as a viable career option for university graduates. However, he cautions that a successful professional financial planner doesn't just need academic qualifications. "You also need to be able to apply life experience and maturity, and to empathise with people," he says. This is why younger advisers team up with the more experienced ones who act as mentors within ING. He suggests that aspirants should ask themselves these questions:

- Can you see it as a real career for yourself?
- What is the real reason you want to go into the industry?
- Do you sincerely have a passion to help people?



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